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L E T T E R
TO THE
B I S H O P S,
ON THE
A P P L I C A T I O N
OF THE
PROTESTANT DISSENTERS,
TO
P A R L I A M E N T,
FOR A REPEAL OF THE
CORPORATION AND TEST ACTS.
INCLUDING
STRICTURES ON SOME PASSAGES
IN THE
BISHOP OF GLOUCESTER'S SERMON,
ON JANUARY 30, 1788.

L O N D O N:

PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON, N^o 72, ST. PAUL'S-CHURCH-
YARD.

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L E T T E R, &c.

MY LORDS,

THE experience of human life must often have furnished us with facts, that verify the truth of the sentiment, which the historian has put into the mouth of Cæsar—*In maxima fortuna minima licentia est*; in the highest stations the conduct lies more open to censure, and is amenable at the tribunal of the public. If you have the honour of moving in an exalted sphere, you must be sensible, that, as the natural consequence of it, you are peculiarly exposed to notice and observation. Not only the dignity of station, but, in your case, the sacred office you sustain, draws the eyes of men to you. On all

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occasions,

occasions, which appear to be particularly connected with the obligations of that character, expectation is raised; and when you take a decided part, it is sure not to escape animadversion. Of all men you perhaps are least to look for indulgence, or even candor, should you appear to be influenced by partiality or resentment, ambition or avarice, because these motives are justly considered as peculiarly derogatory from the sanctity of the *Christian Bishop*.

You have, my Lords, been not long since in this predicament. When, in the year 1787, the Protestant Dissenters brought forward an application to Parliament, for relief from the laws, whereby the Sacramental Test is imposed as a qualification for civil and military offices, the eyes of men were turned to the sacred Bench, and they waited to see what part the Bishops would act. By the fate, which this application met with in the House of Commons, your Lordships were precluded from any opportunity of giving, at that time, a vote on the question,

It was then understood, that the Protestant Dissenters would renew their suit in some future session of Parliament. The Committee, to whom the conduct of this business was entrusted, have now, by circular letters, avowed their determination to bring it on again in the session of 1789.

Then again, my Lords, will the eyes of many be turned to you; and it is not improbable, that by the motion passing through the House of Commons, and being carried up to that of the Peers, your principles and conduct will be actually and publicly brought to the test.

In the mean time, sentiments of respect for your order, and a concern for its true glory, as well as a solicitude for their own success, will excite in the Dissenters an ardent wish, that their application may meet with patronage from the Bishops. It is an affair, which, by its connection with religion, and with the rights of your fellow-christians, appears, in their judgment, particularly to claim your attention and assistance.

The question, concerning the Sacramental Test, involves in it, my Lords, not only our natural privileges, but *your* duty and reputation; for it will come before you, not only as the heads of an establishment, and the ministers of the state, but also as *ministers of Christ*; a character of greater importance, and of higher obligation. We would hope, that your Lordships will see the affair in the same light, and we shall rejoice in an opportunity, to congratulate the Christian world, and the Church of England, on the conduct of its Bishops, evidently directed by an equitable and benevolent spirit towards Dissentients, and by an holy concern for the purity of a Christian institution.

One of your order has indeed, in this instance, damped our rising hopes. He has on a late public and national occasion, the Anniversary of the Martyrdom of King Charles I. seen fit, as it were with a reference to our application, "to advert to the reasons on which the use and equity of a test-law, by way of security to the church established, may be maintained."* But his
 Lordship

* See the Bishop of Gloucester's Sermon before the House of Lords, Jan. 30, 1788. p. 15, 16.

Lordship of Gloucester is a single person, and we would suppose, that he speaks as an individual, whose sentiments are no standard for his brethren, and whose opinion cannot bind them. Nay, we would presume, that, on a review of the question, he may see reason to alter his judgement; at least, as far as it concerns the particular Test imposed by the law: by which, as your Protestant brethren are injured, so the ordinance of your Divine Master is perverted and abused.

Should your Lordships, with Dr. Hallifax, consider “ the Test-Law only as a provision to secure yourselves—as a weapon of defence, to guard you from the attacks of those, who are prepared to catch every opportunity to do you harm—as a law of *restraint*, by which the men, who hold opinions unfriendly to the religion of the state, are withheld from situations, where they might possibly reduce these opinions to practice;” should your Lordships, I say, consider the Test-Law in these views, this is to behold it in the most favourable point of light. But it is a partial light; it is only one aspect of it.

It is the bright side of it, as it looks towards yourselves, and your national establishment and personal interest.

We have a right, my Lords, to expect, that you should consider the other aspects of it; that you should behold it on all sides, and observe its operation on *our* just claims, as your fellow-citizens, and on the honour of that *christianity* of which you are ministers.

How expedient and reasonable soever, it may be, that “ the national church should not lie at the mercy of its enemies, that it should not become a slave;” it can never be fit, that its security should be obtained at the expence of the rights of others, and by a prostitution of Christ’s ordinance. If it be so obtained, then “ the national church becomes a tyrant;” and it *corrupts* the religion which it professes to guard and preserve.

On these points the appeal is, with respect, made to your Lordships. To your Lordships, whose
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rank and office and vows lay you under the strongest obligations to be jealous of the purity of christianity, and the real glory of your own church, is the appeal made.

One reason, on which the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts was grounded, is this:—
 “ The Holy Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper being a matter purely of a religious nature, and being appointed by our blessed Saviour only for the remembrance of his death, ought not to be applied to the secular ends of civil societies.”
 It will be a cause of surprize and grief to many, if this reason should not come to the minds of Prelates, the Ministers of Christ, with that serious force, which it possesseth. Having weight, great weight in itself, it particularly merits, nay, demands the attention of *Bishops*.

It is by no means a point of indifference, whether the institutions of Christ be observed according to the rules which He has prescribed, and for the ends to which He has destined them, or not; unless it be an indifferent thing, whether we
 obey

obey Him, or not; whether we adhere to his instructions, or not. His instructions, in the case before us, are very clear and precise—" *Do this in remembrance of me.*" The ground of obedience here is the authority of Christ; and the design of it is to keep up the remembrance of Him.

But when the Lord's Supper is eaten as a qualification for any worldly emolument, for any civil or military employment, the design and ground of the act are both changed. A new authority is substituted instead of that of the Christian Law-giver; namely, the requisition of the magistrate: a new end is proposed; namely, our own temporal interest; not the remembrance of our Divine Master. If this be not a perversion of the ordinance from its original design: if this be not a gross deviation from the only authentic directory, what can be deemed a corruption of a Christian institution?

The corruption, in this case, my Lords, is of a very serious nature. It is not merely a departure from, or an addition to, the appointment of Christ;

Christ ; it is repugnant to that appointment, and to the whole spirit of the Gospel. The kingdom of Christ is not of this world. “ Ye are not of the world,” saith he to his disciples, “ even as I am not of the world.” Christianity is not a scheme of worldly policy ; nor are its ordinances meant to be subservient to the designs of worldly ambition. Its blessings are spiritual, and its rewards future and eternal. How inconsistent then with the nature of Christianity is it, to make any one of its appointments an instrument of accomplishing our worldly schemes ! “ God forbid,” saith the Apostle, “ that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world.” But what is the language of that man’s heart, who receives the Sacramental Test ? It is this : “ I am not to be crucified to the world, but to obtain its advantages. This action indeed forces upon my mind the remembrance of Christ dying to deliver us from this present evil world : but I commemorate this great instance of His self-denial, not to promote this end of his death—but to carry on my own worldly advancement and interest !

interest !—How absurd ! How shocking is the attempt to blend together, in the same act, views so remote from each other ; so repugnant to the primary design of the Divine Legislator in the appointment of the act !

We read, with astonishment, of the corruptions of this ordinance, which made their way into the church of Corinth. We read, with grief, of the guilt, which the Corinthians contracted, and of the divine judgments which they incurred.

But there was not, my Lords, a circumstance censurable in *their* conduct, which hath not its counterpart in *this* application of the Lord's Supper, as a *Test*. The Corinthians did not distinguish between the Lord's Supper and a common banquet : the Test-Law placeth it on a footing with any civil ceremonial, by which men are invested with any secular office. *They*, through their misapprehensions of its nature, converted it into an occasion of disorder and intemperance : the *Test-Law* makes it subservient to the purposes of avarice and ambition. *They*, at the feast of love, gave way to schisms,

schisms, strife, and debate : the *Test-Law* makes the bond of love the instrument of partial distinctions ; turning it into a political tool, and an engine of state. How similar is the guilt ! Similar in nature, but not, I conceive in *degree*.

Excuse me, my Lords, if I should say, that the abuses of the Lord's Supper, with which the Corinthians were chargeable, were innocent, compared with the prostitution of it which we have now in consideration. They mistook its design, and into that mistake they fell in the infancy of christianity : but they did not, by a *deliberate edict* of their church, pervert the institution, and, by a *standing law*, perpetuate that corruption. The guilt of any abuse of the Lord's Supper, into which the Christian world may have fallen, since that time, is aggravated by being committed against that warning of the criminality and danger of such abuses, which the case of the Corinthians furnishes. On account of their conduct, many of them were weak and sickly, and many slept. The lesson, which, on that occasion, was inculcated by the Apostle, is, that " He who eateth and drinketh unworthily, " eateth and drinketh judgment to himself."

This,

This, my Lords, is an awful warning to future ages; and who should feel the force of it, if not the ministers of religion? It hath awakened in lay-breasts an holy solicitude to recover the purity, to guard the honour of Christ's institution.—Shall Bishops be less concerned for either?

Much ought it to be regretted; if, on the rising occasion, you should not improve your influence, and testify your serious zeal, in this matter. If the commandment of Christ can be considered as committed to any man, with a peculiar charge to keep it without spot, and unrebukeable to the day of Christ, it must be to those who are looked upon as “Stewards of the mysteries of God.” It is required of stewards, that they be found faithful. But where is their fidelity, if they connive at the prostitution of any part of a sacred deposit, entrusted to them, to be preserved pure and undefiled. But, if not only conniving at, they vote for perpetuating that prostitution, may it not be feared, that the Lord, whom they serve, will consider them as betraying the cause committed to them?

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For the Ministers of Jesus Christ to be advocates for a law, which prostitutes and perverts an *holy sacrament* of his religion, yea, a law which makes THEMSELVES the very *instruments* and *tools* of this shameful prostitution, is such a violation of their character, such a prostitution of their sacred office, such a betraying of the solemn trust committed to them by God, for which they must give an account to the chief pastor at his coming, as cannot but greatly shock an attentive beholder; and as such, should give, methinks, extremely painful apprehensions to themselves.

Can the evil of this conduct be otherwise than great? The Sacramental Test invites, tempts, and constrains men to do, what their own conscience accuses them for doing. Here the church and the state do not maintain their union and alliance; but each acts contrary to the other. The rubric of the church, respecting the celebration of the communion, forbids blasphemers of God, slanderers of his word, adulterers, &c. to come to the holy table; the law of the state requireth all to come, without any discrimination of character, and allows

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not the Minister to carry into effect the prohibition of the church.*

Should it be asked, what fellowship hath Christ with Belial; what communion hath light with darkness? The answer is, the Sacramental Test establisheth such a communion; such an unnatural and inconsistent alliance. Shall it be added that the votes of the holy priesthood have confirmed this repugnant intercourse?

Too many, compelled by the Test-Law, it may be supposed, will continue to come to the table of Christ, conscious of performing a solemn duty of religion, without any religious principle or view; doing, what a reverence for the command of Christ alone can justify their doing, without any serious regard to *his* authority; and terrified with the fear of being guilty of the body and blood of Christ. Can the Bishops of the Christian church think of the

*The Dissenting Gentleman's Letters to Mr. White, 6th edit. 8vo Appendix II. The opinions of three eminent lawyers, respecting a clergyman's refusing to administer the sacrament to a notorious evil-liver.

the case of such without pity, without an holy sol-
citude to prevent their guilt ?

“ If any man be overtaken with a fault, saith the Apostle, ye that are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness.” Should your votes, my Lords, be given for the continuance of the Sacramental Test, it deserves consideration ; whether, instead of restoring such, you will not throw new temptations in their way ; whether you will not perpetuate the snare, which entices them to profane the ordinance of Christ ?

When men are thus constrained to prostitute the institution of Christ, and to prevaricate with conscience, can it otherwise than have a bad influence on the state of their minds and their general conduct ? Our divine Master hath predicted, that “ Offences will come ;” or occasions of drawing men into sin will arise ; but he adds, “ Woe to him by whom the offence cometh.” By whom, in this case, will it, for the future, come, but by those, whose authority and influence shall contribute to support, and to give a new sanction to an abuse of a sacred institution ?

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Shall

Shall it come by *those*, who, by the nature of their office, are guardians of virtue, preachers of righteousness, helpers of the faith, holiness and joy of Christians? Is this, it will be asked, their regard for the ordinance of Christ? Is this their zeal for the honour of his church? Is this their love to mankind? Can it be, that it is a matter of no concern to *them*; so that the church, in appearance, may have an accession to its members; that this accession is obtained by a violation of conscience, by the profanation of a Christian ordinance, and by the admission of open sinners, and of professed deists, if not atheists, to its communion? A real Christian Bishop, however he may overlook, when his attention has not been called to it, the nature of this measure, can never, knowingly and designedly, give his consent to it.

These general considerations apply, my Lords, more closely, than probably you are aware; and affect the members and clergy of your own church, as well as Protestant Dissenters. There are, though their number should not be great, some pious and worthy gentlemen, in constant and full communion

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with

with your church, who would scruple to receive the Lord's Supper, as a qualification for any worldly employment. There are, in the inferior classes of the clerical order, conscientious clergymen, who scruple to administer it, as a test for civil posts; who much more scruple to admit to it, with this view, persons of vicious characters, but who dare not refuse it. Laudable are the scruples of such members, and of such Ministers of the church; they are its worthy, its honourable Members and Ministers.

May it not be hoped, that *their* difficulties, if not our grievances, will affect the minds of their spiritual overseers? May it not be hoped, that however the pleas of Dissenters may be disregarded, the tenderness of *their* consciences, by the friendly exertions of their superiors, will be relieved?

Did the gentlemen, who sit on the sacred bench, when moving in the humbler station of parochial priests, never feel the like conscientious scruples? Or having felt them, can they be indifferent to the case of those who are burdened with the same?

Though, by some favourable circumstances in the preceding stations of your lives, the like painful and serious difficulties might never, my Lords, be thrown in your way; yet the case of those who are exposed to them merits your pious and paternal sympathy. For the honour of the mitre, it may be hoped, that you will, by no means, lose any opportunity, which may offer, of giving ease to scrupulous consciences, in your communion; or of saving serious clergymen from a weight on their spirits, and of screening them from vexatious prosecutions.

On this ground the application of the Dissenters, for the repeal of the Sacramental Test, appears to merit your serious attention. It comes home, in our opinion, to the obligations of your character as Ministers of Christ. We shall be surprized and grieved, if it doth not, in the same manner, affect your minds. Your being averse to the repeal of it, your being indifferent to it, will lay your Lordships open to the charge of criminal remissness, about preserving the purity and genuine force of the institution of your divine Master.

Here

Here we think we might wholly rest our suit with your Lordships, as *his* Ministers.

But we are aware, my Lords, that you sustain another character, that of the Ministers of a particular establishment.

We persuade ourselves, that your Lordships would by no means wish, that the opprobrium of being a *persecuting church* should lie upon it. But while the Test and Corporation Acts are in being, we see not how it can wipe off this reproach. Your minds, my Lords, revolt at the imputation. You are ready to reject it as illiberal, as unjust. Bishop Hallifax enters his protest against considering the Test-Law "as an artful mode of harassing adversaries—as an engine of oppression, to lay men under legal disabilities, or as a *penal* law, and by way of punishment for opinions."* Though your Lordships should approve his distinctions, and be ready to adopt his language, we must say, that the distinctions are futile. Men may behold an object

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* See the Bishop of Gloucester's Sermon, on Jan. 30, 1788, page 16.

through a false medium, but the nature of things is too stubborn to bend to our misconceptions.

You, my Lords, probably consider only, what you may deem, the expedient and salutary operation of the Corporation and Test Acts. Allow others to judge of them by a different influence, and to refer their sentiments to your judgment, as materials for forming a more comprehensive and equitable opinion of them.

Protestant Dissenters feel themselves *injured* by those acts. Being injured persons they may be allowed to complain. Let the impartial and candid judge between your Lordships and us, whether our complaints be well founded.

These acts operate as a bar to the full enjoyment of our natural rights. "Not that the actual possession of civil offices is the right of any subject; but a capacity of being elected or appointed to them is the right of every good subject."* Of this capacity

* Furneaux's Letters to Blackstone, p. 164, 2d edit.

city we are deprived. This deprivation placeth us on a much more disadvantageous footing, than are our fellow subjects of the established church. It excludes us from posts of honour and emolument. It ties up our hands from serving our King and Country. The laudable and useful ambition to move in spheres of public utility and influence is checked ; it meets with no object to gratify, no reward to cherish it. Nay more, we are not only, in this case, losers, but *sufferers*. Not to negative evils merely are we exposed, but to *positive* ones, of that kind which most sensibly affect an ingenuous mind. Those statutes hold us up, as persons not worthy of confidence, as not deserving any share in the revenues or honours of the state, which we contribute to support.

Why this exclusion?—Why this reproach?—
 “ When we view the sects of Christianity, which actually prevail in the world, we must confess, that with the single exception of refusing to bear arms, we find no tenet in any of them, which incapacitates men for the service of the state.”* We ask,

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therefore,

* Paley's Moral and Political Philosophy, 4to. p. 582.

therefore, again, why are these exclusions continued against Protestant Dissenters? Why is this ignominy suffered to remain on them? Why are not the means of providing for our families as open to us as to others? Why is our sphere of exertion and usefulness limited by acts of Parliament?

Is it, because Dissenters possess not the same vigour of mind, the same strength of judgment, and the same comprehension of soul, which other men possess? Not the most prejudiced will venture to assert or insinuate this. We are naturally as well qualified to fill posts of honour or of profit, as are any of our fellow-subjects.

Is disloyalty the cause of this exclusion? Can suspicions light upon us as enemies to the government, and to our happy constitution? This plea cannot, with truth, be urged. Who took an active part in the restoration of Charles II.? The Dissenters of those times, especially the Presbyterians. By whom in particular hath the memory of King William and the glorious Revolution been held

held more sacred, than by Protestant Dissenters? To whom did the House of Hanover owe its accession to the throne of England, more than to the Dissenters? Their zeal, on that occasion, was exerted without making terms for themselves, without attempting to secure any emoluments to their religious profession. In the annals of the House of Hanover, the zeal and loyalty of Protestant Dissenters will be recorded to the latest times.

In the late war, it is true, some of them repro-
bated the measures of the Ministry, and ably de-
fended the rights of America to be taxed only by
her own representatives. But these sentiments were
not peculiar to them; having been espoused, and
with a manly, liberal spirit, supported by the votes,
and by the pens of many members of the establish-
ed church. The Dissenters, on this occasion,
argued on the principles of a Locke; on princi-
ples which had been announced, before that un-
happy war, from the pulpit and from the press, by
one of the greatest ornaments, my Lords, of your
own

own Bench—by a LOWTH, a name connecting with it learning, taste, and worth.*

But if, neither on account of incapacity, nor of disloyalty, Protestant Dissenters are excluded from civil offices, it remains, that the ground of this exclusion is their conscientious dissent from the religious establishment of their country. This exclusion, if words have any meaning, is *persecution*. “ I know no other definition of persecution, than “ that it is an injury inflicted on a person for his “ religious principles or profession only.”†

In these liberal times the word sounds harsh. You, my Lords, will not admit the charge. You plead, that it is not the spirit of intolerance that dictates your support of the Corporation and Test Laws, but that it was a measure of prudence suggested by self-interest; which the safety of your own church constrained you, with reluctance, to adopt.

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* See Dr. Price's Appendix to his Fast Sermon in 1779.

† Furneaux's Letters to Blackstone, p. 164, 2d edit,

“ It is of the nature of religious sects,” argues
 one of your order, “ as such, to conceive their
 “ own system of faith and worship to be pure, and
 “ to approach nearer the standard of perfection,
 “ than that of any other ; for on no principle but
 “ this, can they be supposed to have *separated*
 “ from other religious societies, whether national
 “ or tolerated. Under this persuasion they will
 “ be always trying (and the more sincere they are
 “ in their persuasion, the more earnestly they will
 “ be trying) to propagate their own opinions, and
 “ to advance their own models on the ruin of the
 “ rest ; and, as the surest way of effecting this, to
 “ interest the state in their service, by gaining a
 “ part of the legislature to their side, in this pur-
 “ suit ; besides the simple motive of truth, it may
 “ be presumed, they will be not a little stimulated,
 “ from the view of those temporal emoluments,
 “ which they see annexed to the religion of the
 “ magistrate, and from which they themselves,
 “ unjustly, as they will think, are at present ex-
 “ cluded. Nor is there any other way of pre-
 “ venting them from accomplishing their de-
 “ signs, and erecting themselves into the national
 church,

“ church, than by keeping them out of the public administration, and taking care that offices of trust and dignity, in the disposal of government, shall be conferred on such persons only, whose principles incline them to preserve the constitution *in all its parts*. Now this is the precise business of a TEST.*”

A writer, who was an honour to the law-department,† argued, some years since, in a similar manner. “ If every sect,” said he, “ were indulged in a free communion of civil employments, the idea of a national establishment would at once be destroyed, and the episcopal church would be no longer the church of England.”

Thus men deceive themselves, and endeavour to impose on others with fair speeches. They disguise their conduct and their motives, to reconcile themselves to both, and to procure the approbation of others.

The

* Bishop of Gloucester's Sermon on Jan. 30, 1788, p. 15.

† Judge Blackstone.

The disguise, in this case, is weak, and the plea fallacious. "What! cannot the church be established in the possession and enjoyment of her peculiar temporalities, her tythes, prebends, canonries, archdeaconries, deaneries, and bishoprics by law, unless she engross all civil as well as ecclesiastical offices to herself? Can there be no legal establishment of, and no legal and national provision made for a *church*, unless all the offices and emoluments of the state are annexed to it."* There is no natural connection between the deprivation of Dissenters and the safety of the church.

His Lordship, the Bishop of Gloucester, argues, that there is such a connection. For religious sects, under a persuasion of the greater purity of their own system, "will always be trying to propagate their own opinions, and to advance their own models on the ruins of the rest; and, as the surest way of effecting this, to interest the state in their service, by gaining a part of the Legislature to their side."

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* Furneaux's Letters to Blackstone, p. 162, 2d edit.

FACTS, which are stubborn things, militate against this idea, and prove it to be futile and nugatory. Under the same government, within the same kingdom, there exists an established church without the security of a Test; and there are Dissenters, whose conduct does not threaten the establishment. As our case urges: "The Episcopalians in North-Britain,* who are the Dissenters from the church established in that part of the united kingdoms, are not liable to any incapacities in consequence of their not qualifying themselves by receiving the sacrament according to the usage of the church of Scotland; but are capable of all the advantages of the civil government, by taking the oaths, &c. as appointed by law." Yet the church of Scotland suffers not either in her emoluments or constitution. A like state of things existed in England, under a Presbyterian government. The Rump Parliament, at a time when religious zeal rose to as high a degree of jealousy, resentment and distrust, as at any period, enacted no religious Test; but, abolishing

* In Ireland there is now no Test-Law.

abolishing the oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy, only appointed a new one, called the ENGAGEMENT, which was, to be true and faithful to the *government established, without King or House of Peers*. This was the only condition of holding any place or office of trust in the Commonwealth.* Yet the Presbyterian establishment of that time neither apprehended nor felt danger from the want of a religious Test. There was a time, when the church of England had not this barrier. It was all the length of time, that elapsed before the enacting of the Test-Law in the reign of Charles II.†

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* Neal's History of the Puritans, v. 4. p. 2. 8vo.

† Bishop Hallifax, (see his Sermon, p. 18, note,) says, "That long before this period, there had been *penal laws* against Dissenters in plenty." It is true; but will the Bishop vindicate those *penal laws*; or can the iniquity of former periods justify the iniquity of later times. Besides, those *penal laws* were of a different nature from the Test-Law, both in principle and effect: they were pointed against certain principles and practices as *heretical*, and they did not operate as disqualifications for civil offices. The Bishop owns, that all employments of the state were laid as "open to Dissenters as to others."

How came the church of England to be more insecure since that period than before ? How came it to stand on a more precarious footing, than did Presbytery in the times of the Commonwealth ; or than does the church of Scotland, or Ireland, at this day ? It generally holds true ; that the broader the basis, the firmer will stand the building erected on it. Unhappily, the church of England is a structure of that kind, that it owes its security to narrowing its basis.

Miserable security, which it derives from excluding the honest and conscientious, and from admitting to civil posts men of no conscience, or of a pliant one !—Miserable security, founded on the prostitution of the Sacrament, and derived from counteracting, or interfering with the authority of the great head of the Christian church !—Miserable security, which arises from oppression, from the oppression of the upright and scrupulous, and from showing favour to apostates or hypocrites ; to men who join the communion of the church, not from conviction but interest, not from attachment to her, but from a regard to their own fortunes !

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The circumstances under which originated the Test-Act, for which the Bishop of Gloucester is an advocate, shew that it is needless and ungenerous, in the established church, to have recourse to so miserable a security against Protestant Non-Conformists. It is *needless* as to them; for *they* generously permitted it to pass into a Law, though they saw that it would eventually operate against themselves, for the security of the established church against popery.

Are the persons, who readily sacrificed their own interest and safety to secure and guard that of the Protestant, national, episcopal church, to be suspected of a disposition to advance their own models on the ruin of that church? Can *that* church need the security of the Test-Law against such Dissenters? Or is it *generous* to retain in force a law, to the burden and evils of which, these Dissenters, for the safety of this church, at first exposed themselves.

In this view, in every view, my Lords, the Test-Law and the Corporation-Act are a dishonour

to your church. What can be dishonourable to any establishment, if it be not so to owe its support to measures subversive of the just and equitable claims of fellow-subjects? To say of an established religion, that its security is founded in iniquity; how disgraceful! To say of its Ministers, that they are advocates for a little, illiberal policy, for a policy unfair and oppressive; is to accuse them of deserting the character of preachers of righteousness, and of assuming, in its room, that of the instruments of intolerance.

Whatever pleas may be urged to extenuate the evil, or whatever defence may be set up to justify the tenor and operation of the Corporation and Test-Acts, they really constitute a species of persecution; and a vote given to support them is in favour of persecuting measures. For though Protestant Dissenters are tolerated, yet as they are excluded from many civil offices, they are injuriously treated; and such treatment is persecution. They are persecuted in a manner, which affects their reputation, their fortunes, and what to a benevolent

nevolent mind is more dear than either, their usefulness to their country.

This persecution ariseth not from the state merely, but from the *church*. The safety of the church is the pretext for it. The leaders of the church support it. To what conclusion doth this view of the subject lead us ? It leads, my lords, to fix the charge of being a *persecuting* church on the church of England. It tends, one of your own Bench being judge, to fix on her the mark of *Antichrist*.

“ One obvious character,” saith Bishop Hurd,
 “ of Antichrist, or rather complication of charac-
 “ ters, is that triple brand impressed upon him, of
 “ a tyrannical, intolerant, and idolatrous power.
 “ The prophets hold him up to us, as *reigning* or
 “ exercising an *oppressive* and supereminent do-
 “ minion ; as persecuting *good* and *conscientious*
 “ *Christians*.”*

* Bishop Hurd's Sermons on Prophecy, p. 368, 1st edit.

His Lordship has applied this description of Antichrist to the church of Rome. The justness of his application is not to be disputed. But the propriety of its limitation to that communion may be questioned. Where the same descriptive marks are found, I conceive, the same ignominious character must exist. " Though John calls the complicated human power, by which the genuine doctrines of the gospel were to be perverted and depraved by the title of *Antichrist*, yet we must remember, that in the same passage, (1 John 2. 18.) He plainly intimates, that in his sense of the expression, there may, at the same time, be *many Antichrists*."*

In our consideration of the prophecies concerning the Man of Sin, or Antichrist, the circumstance of local situation is but one, and the least weighty. The general question concerning the truth and propriety of their application, must be determined by the conformity of any power to the grand and leading marks of Antichrist, laid down
in

* Evanfon's Letter to the Bishop of Litchfield and Coventry,
p. 13.

in them. Local situation may particularly point out the church of Rome ; but if the other essential and striking features are found in other communities, can these communities stand clear of the charge ?

Though the church of England should not persecute to the same *extent*, or to the *same degree* of severity with which some other churches have persecuted ; yet, if in *any degree* she persecutes ; if, in *any degree* she is intolerant, so far she symbolises with the Man of Sin ; so far she answers to the character of Antichrist. As long as the Test and Corporation Acts remain in being ; as long as they derive support from the members of the church of England ; so long, we conceive, they will be monuments and proofs, that the pride of secular domination, that the relentless zeal against the rights of conscience, which are the distinctive marks of Antichrist, exist in that church, and enter into her character.

The church of England, indeed, we own, will not, like that of Rome, avow the crime. She
feels

feels the disgrace of its imputation, and by pleading *not guilty*, would hope to avoid it. But if facts—if actions prove it; if standing statutes of a *persecuting* complexion should be perpetuated; should be corroborated by future and new votes in their favour—if operating laws that are daily executed—if these things have a meaning and are evidence, she must be found *guilty*. The verdict lieth against her, and will lie against her, till she steps forward and exerts herself to set aside these abiding *proofs* of guilt.

However gentle modern Bishops may be, the church of England is still a persecuting church; and her principles would lead her to the roasting of heretics alive, as 200 years ago. But thanks be to God! the civil power has restrained her.

Every one who respects the learning, the rank, and the personal worth of the gentlemen that sit on the episcopal Bench, must sincerely regret it, if this charge of persecution should continue to lie against that body. It will particularly criminate *them*; for they are the guardians of the church, and

and their share in the legislature of the nation leads them to take an active part in perpetuating, or annulling the energies of the Corporation and Test-Acts.

It is with singular pleasure, that we receive from one of your own order, the following sentiments concerning the present *disposition* of the church.

“ Literature and philosophy have so enlightened
 “ and enlarged the minds of men, by showing
 “ them the narrowness of the limits of the human
 “ understanding in every branch of science, as well
 “ as in the investigation of the truths of natural
 “ and revealed religion, that the present church of
 “ England, we are confident, had she the power,
 “ would be far from treading in the sanguinary
 “ footsteps of the former church of England, as
 “ the British Legislature would be now from grant-
 “ ing her the authority of doing it, which was so
 “ superstitiously conceded to her, in an age of
 “ ignorance and of ecclesiastical domination.*”

C 4

To

* Bishop Watson's Charge to the Diocese of Landaff, in June 1788, p. 29.

To apply this general representation of the present temper of the church ; do not *you*, my Lords, reprobate, with abhorrence, the unrelenting rigour of your Archbishops PARKER, BANCROFT, WHITGIFT, and LAUD ? Hold you not in detestation those tyrannising Prelates, whose severities drove thousands of distressed families to the deserts of America ? Do not *you* condemn those cruel acts by which your church, without making any provision for their support, cast out at once above *two thousand* pious and excellent ministers ; and afterwards banished them five miles from any city, borough, or church, in which they had before served ? Read *you* not, with a benevolent tear, the sad tales of those *eight thousand* Protestant Dissenters, who perished in prison, in the reign only of Charles II. ? Yes, my Lords, as you review those monuments of episcopal severity, you say, “ If we had been in the days of our fathers, we “ would not have been partakers with them in the “ blood and miseries of those conscientious sufferers.” From the liberal resentments which you feel at these proceedings, let us promise ourselves, that you will generously step forth, on the approaching

proaching occasion, and show your zeal to remove every vestige of persecution, every trace of what Bishops have been. Far be it from any of your order to give us, or the world, room to feel grief for your tarnished honours.

There arose, you well know, my Lords, in the times of civil confusion and anarchy, a set of turbulent enthusiasts, called *Fifth-Monarchy Men*, whose favourite notion it was, that "dominion" was founded in grace, and that the saints only "should have rule." Little is it to be expected, that in the eighteenth century, any shall appear to act upon so wild a principle; much less, that the learned, the enlightened Bench of English Prelates, shall pursue a line of conduct, that approximates towards it. Yet a vote given to continue the limitation of all the civil offices and emoluments of this country, to those who avow themselves members of the national church, would reduce the doctrine of these enthusiasts to practice. It would approach very nearly to saying: "The saints only shall bear rule." Do not your Lordships perceive, that it would lie open to this construction;

a construction not forced, but natural and easy ;
and that Bishops so voting might properly be
called *Fifth-Monarchy Men* ?

Indeed, my Lords, this wild doctrine, and all
actions that symbolize with it, are very remote from
the benevolent and spiritual design of Christianity ;
peculiarly foreign from the nature and views of the
episcopal character. You consider yourselves, and
you wish to be considered, as successors to the
Apostles. But should you give a vote, against
our application, to be relieved from oppressive laws,
and to be reinstated in our natural rights, it may
be questioned ; whether your conduct, in that case,
can be urged in proof of such succession. It is
very certain that the Apostles were prohibited the
exercise of jurisdiction over one another, or over
their fellow-disciples. “ Jesus called unto them,
“ and said ; ye know, that the Princes of the Gen-
“ tiles exercise dominion over them ; and they that
“ are great exercise authority upon them : but it
“ shall not be so among you : but whosoever will be
“ great among you, let him be your minister ; and
“ whosoever will be chief among you, let him be
“ your

" your servant." Matt. xx. 25, 26, 27. It is also very certain, that it was characteristic of the Apostles. " We have not dominion over your faith, " but are helpers of your joy." It is as certain, that it is enjoined on Christian Bishops, to " feed " the flock of God, taking the oversight, not by " constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, " but of a ready mind : not as lords over God's " heritage."

To your calm consideration, is the appeal made; whether, my Lords, taking an active part on a *religious account only*, to the prejudice of others; to the prejudice of their natural rights and just claims, would not be exercising dominion with a heavy hand? Whether it would not be arrogating authority, and employing it to very hurtful purposes? If it would, it is referred, my Lords, to your cool and serious thoughts, whether it would not be transgressing the limits of your commission, and exceeding the prerogatives of your office, as both are assigned by the Great Shepherd, and Bishop of Souls. And, with reluctance, it must be intimated, whether that domination and intolerance, from
which,

which, in the business of the Test-Law, the church of England is not clear, will not be particularly chargeable on the Bishops?

These insinuations, will, perhaps, be censured, as illiberal, but oppressed innocence must be allowed to speak; and to refer its cause to reason and equity. If these remonstrances be not well founded, it is hoped, that they will make no impression: If they be well founded, they nearly concern those to whom they are addressed. The honour of their own character, the honour of the church of which they are leaders, is involved in their truth.

Although the question which will be brought before you is not new; yet, having had no particular call to it, you may never have entered into the investigation of it. You may not have been aware, how much it affects your duty and reputation, as Ministers of Christ; what connection it hath with your fidelity to your Divine Master, and your accountableness at his tribunal. For the human mind is not always attentive to the consideration of every question that may come before it :
much

much less to every view, in which a subject may be placed.

Should these reflections, my Lords, engage your consideration, they may lead you into a new train of thinking; they may raise new solitudes in your breasts. Is it not to be hoped, that a consequence the most honourable to yourselves may result from this; either that you will anticipate the Dissenters in bringing forward a motion for their relief—or else, when their cause is by themselves brought into the House where you sit, you will become its warm and generous patrons. Either step will reflect glory on the episcopal character, and give it weight and dignity.

Your real honour, as ministers of truth; as the friends of the oppressed; as patrons of pure Christianity; is sincerely wished,

MY LORDS,

By your's, respectfully.

